

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re Application of:	Frank Schmeyer	Examiner: Daniel Lastra
Application Number:	09/802,082	Group Art Unit: 3622
Filing Date:	March 8, 2001	Confirmation No. 5338
Title:	SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING CONSUMER REWARDS	Attorney Docket No.: 15328.01US2

SUPPLEMENTAL PETITION

Attn: Office of Petitions
Mail Stop Petition
Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

Dear Sirs:

On May 15, 2007 Applicant filed a Request for Extension of Time, Petition to Revive and continuation application. During a recent review of the application file wrapper, Applicant realized that the continuation application included with the Petition to Revive was not filed separately, so it was not assigned a serial number.

Applicant contacted the Petitions Branch who advised that we should re-file the continuation application to have a serial number assigned by the Patent Office and to resubmit a duplicate copy of the re-filed application along with a Supplemental Petition.

Applicant respectfully requests that the Examiner grant the Petition to Revive and substitute the "unfiled" continuation application with the recently filed continuation application that was assigned Serial No. 11/866,069 (copy attached).

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any fees associated with this Supplemental Petition to Deposit Account Number 502,261. The Commissioner is also authorized to charge any fee deficiency or credit overpayment to Deposit Account No. 502,261.

Certificate of Electronic Transmission Under 37 CFR §1.8: I hereby certify that this correspondence is being transmitted to the United States Patent and Trademark Office using the EFS-Web System on October 2, 2007.

By: /Marianne A. Hall/
Marianne A. Hall

Please contact the undersigned attorney if there are any questions regarding this application or this Petition.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: October 2, 2007

By: / Michael A. Carrillo /
Michael A. Carrillo, Reg. No.44,595
Neal Gerber & Eisenberg LLP
2 N. LaSalle, Suite 2200
Chicago, Illinois 60602
312.269.8000

NGEDOCs: 1467228.1

Certificate of Electronic Transmission Under 37 CFR §1.8: I hereby certify that this correspondence is being transmitted to the United States Patent and Trademark Office using the EFS-Web System on October 2, 2007.

By: /Marianne A. Hall/
Marianne A. Hall

Electronic Acknowledgement Receipt

EFS ID:	2269726
Application Number:	11866069
International Application Number:	
Confirmation Number:	6459
Title of Invention:	System and Method for Providing Consumer Rewards
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	Frank Schmeyer
Customer Number:	25541
Filer:	Maurice Edward Finnegan/Marianne Hall
Filer Authorized By:	Maurice Edward Finnegan
Attorney Docket Number:	015328.01US4
Receipt Date:	02-OCT-2007
Filing Date:	
Time Stamp:	16:01:11
Application Type:	Utility under 35 USC 111(a)

Payment information:

Submitted with Payment	no
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File Listing:

Document Number	Document Description	File Name	File Size(Bytes) /Message Digest	Multi Part /.zip	Pages (if appl.)
1		RefiledApplication.pdf	2660088	yes	61
			5fc63896b0274e05d35df3a07e1be575cd0e8eb4		

	Multipart Description/PDF files in .zip description		
	Document Description	Start	End
	Miscellaneous Incoming Letter	1	5
	Application Data Sheet	6	7
	Oath or Declaration filed	8	9
	Specification	10	44
	Claims	45	50
	Abstract	51	51
	Drawings	52	61
Warnings:			
Information:			
Total Files Size (in bytes):		2660088	
<p>This Acknowledgement Receipt evidences receipt on the noted date by the USPTO of the indicated documents, characterized by the applicant, and including page counts, where applicable. It serves as evidence of receipt similar to a Post Card, as described in MPEP 503.</p> <p><u>New Applications Under 35 U.S.C. 111</u> If a new application is being filed and the application includes the necessary components for a filing date (see 37 CFR 1.53(b)-(d) and MPEP 506), a Filing Receipt (37 CFR 1.54) will be issued in due course and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the filing date of the application.</p> <p><u>National Stage of an International Application under 35 U.S.C. 371</u> If a timely submission to enter the national stage of an international application is compliant with the conditions of 35 U.S.C. 371 and other applicable requirements a Form PCT/DO/EO/903 indicating acceptance of the application as a national stage submission under 35 U.S.C. 371 will be issued in addition to the Filing Receipt, in due course.</p> <p><u>New International Application Filed with the USPTO as a Receiving Office</u> If a new international application is being filed and the international application includes the necessary components for an international filing date (see PCT Article 11 and MPEP 1810), a Notification of the International Application Number and of the International Filing Date (Form PCT/RO/105) will be issued in due course, subject to prescriptions concerning national security, and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the international filing date of the application.</p>			

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re Application of: Frank Schmeyer

Application Number: To be Assigned.

Filing Date: Herewith.

Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD
FOR PROVIDING
CONSUMER REWARDS

Examiner: To be Assigned.

Group Art Unit: To be Assigned.

Confirmation No. To be Assigned.

Attorney Docket No.: 15328.01US4

OFFICE COMMUNICATION

Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

Dear Sirs:

On May 15, 2007 Applicant filed a Request for Extension of Time, Petition to Revive and continuation application in parent application U.S. Application 09/802,082. During a recent review of the application file wrapper for U.S. Application 09/802,082, Applicant realized that the continuation application included with the Petition to Revive was not assigned a serial number or filing date since it was filed along with the Petition to Revive.

Applicant contacted the Petitions Branch who advised that we should re-file the continuation application to have a serial number assigned by the Patent Office and to request that the filing date of **May 15, 2007** be granted to this newly filed application (as shown on the attached electronic acknowledgement receipt) and that the fees associated with the un-filed application in U.S. Application 09/802,082 be transferred to this newly filed application.

Applicant has calculated no fee to be due in connection with the filing of this Communication. However, the Commissioner is authorized to charge any fee deficiency associated with the filing of this Communication to Deposit Account 502,261.

Certificate of Electronic Transmission Under 37 CFR §1.8: I hereby certify that this correspondence is being transmitted to the United States Patent and Trademark Office using the EFS-Web System on October 2, 2007.

By: /Marianne A. Hall/
Marianne A. Hall

Application No. 09/802,082
Attorney Docket No. 15328.01US2
Supplemental Petition

Examiner: Daniel Lastra
Art Unit: 3622

Please contact the undersigned attorney if there are any questions regarding this application or this Petition.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: October 2, 2007

By: / Michael A. Carrillo /
Michael A. Carrillo, Reg. No.44,595
Neal Gerber & Eisenberg LLP
2 N. LaSalle, Suite 2200
Chicago, Illinois 60602
312.269.8000

NGEDOCS: 1467244.1

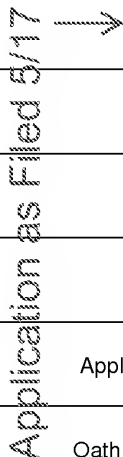
Electronic Acknowledgement Receipt

EFS ID:	1778205
Application Number:	09802082
International Application Number:	
Confirmation Number:	5338
Title of Invention:	System and method for providing consumer rewards
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	Frank F. Schmeier
Customer Number:	25541
Filer:	Thomas Evan Williams/Elizabeth Kostiuk
Filer Authorized By:	Thomas Evan Williams
Attorney Docket Number:	35352.0181/1
Receipt Date:	15-MAY-2007
Filing Date:	08-MAR-2001
Time Stamp:	17:17:11
Application Type:	Utility

Payment information:

Submitted with Payment	yes
Payment was successfully received in RAM	\$ 3720
RAM confirmation Number	797
Deposit Account	502261
The Director of the USPTO is hereby authorized to charge indicated fees and credit any overpayment as follows: Charge any Additional Fees required under 37 C.F.R. Section 1.16 and 1.17	

File Listing:

Document Number	Document Description	File Name	File Size(Bytes)	Multi Part /.zip	Pages (if appl.)
1		Petition.pdf	2412544	yes	59
<div>Application as Filed 5/17</div> <div></div>	Multipart Description/PDF files in .zip description				
	Document Description		Start	End	
	Petition for review by the Office of Petitions.		1	2	
	Extension of Time		3	3	
	Specification		4	38	
	Claims		39	44	
	Abstract		45	45	
	Drawings		46	55	
	Application Data Sheet		56	57	
	Oath or Declaration filed		58	59	
Warnings:					
Information:					
2	Fee Worksheet (PTO-06)	fee-info.pdf	8804	no	2
Warnings:					
Information:					
Total Files Size (in bytes):			2421348		

This Acknowledgement Receipt evidences receipt on the noted date by the USPTO of the indicated documents, characterized by the applicant, and including page counts, where applicable. It serves as evidence of receipt similar to a Post Card, as described in MPEP 503.

New Applications Under 35 U.S.C. 111

If a new application is being filed and the application includes the necessary components for a filing date (see 37 CFR 1.53(b)-(d) and MPEP 506), a Filing Receipt (37 CFR 1.54) will be issued in due course and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the filing date of the application.

National Stage of an International Application under 35 U.S.C. 371

If a timely submission to enter the national stage of an international application is compliant with the conditions of 35 U.S.C. 371 and other applicable requirements a Form PCT/DO/EO/903 indicating acceptance of the application as a national stage submission under 35 U.S.C. 371 will be issued in addition to the Filing Receipt, in due course.

New International Application Filed with the USPTO as a Receiving Office

If a new international application is being filed and the international application includes the necessary components for an international filing date (see PCT Article 11 and MPEP 1810), a Notification of the International Application Number and of the International Filing Date (Form PCT/RO/105) will be issued in due course, subject to prescriptions concerning national security, and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the international filing date of the application.

Application Data Sheet**Application Information**

Application Type::	Regular
Subject Matter::	Utility
Suggested Classification::	N/A
Suggested Group Art Unit::	N/A
CD-ROM or CD-R?	None
Title::	System And Method For Providing Consumer Rewards

Attorney Docket Number::	15328.01US4
Request for Early Publication?::	No
Request for Non-Publication?::	No
Suggested Drawing Figure::	
Total Drawing Sheets::	19
Small Entity::	Yes
Petition Included?::	No
Secrecy Order in Parent Appl.?::	No

Applicant Information

Applicant Authority type::	Inventor
Primary Citizenship Country::	U.S.
Status::	Full Capacity
Given Name::	Frank F.
Family Name::	Schmeyer
Name Suffix::	
City of Residence::	Boca Raton
State or Province of Residence::	Florida
Country of Residence::	U.S.
Street of mailing address::	19710 Sawgrass Drive
City of mailing address::	Boca Raton
State or Province of mailing address::	Florida

Country of mailing address:: U.S.

Postal or Zip Code of mailing address:: 33434

Correspondence Information

Correspondence Customer Number:: 25541

Phone Number:: (312) 269-8000

Fax Number:: (312) 269-1747

E-mail address:: ipdocket@ngelaw.com

Representative Information

Representative Customer Number:: 25541

Domestic Priority Information

Application::	Continuity Type::	Parent Application::	Parent Filing Date::
This application	is a continuation of	09/802,082	03/08/2001
09/802,082	claims benefit of	60/221,468	07/26/2000

Foreign Priority Information

Country::	Application Number::	Filing Date::	Priority Claimed::
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Assignment Information

Assignee Name:: IDINE REWARDS NETWORK INC.

Street of mailing address:: 11900 Biscayne Boulevard

City of mailing address:: North Miami

State or Province of mailing address:: Florida

Country of mailing address:: US

Postal or Zip Code of mailing address:: 33181

NGEDOCs: 1425204.2

Please type a plus sign (+) inside this box →



PTO/SB/01 (12-97)

Approved for use through 9/30/00. OMB 0651-0032
Patent and Trademark Office; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it contains a valid OMB control number.

DECLARATION FOR UTILITY OR DESIGN PATENT APPLICATION (37 CFR 1.63) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Declaration Submitted With Initial Filing OR <input type="checkbox"/> Declaration Submitted after Initial Filing (surcharge (37 CFR 1.16 (e)) required)	Attorney Docket Number	35352.0181/1
	First Named Inventor	Frank F. Schmeyer
	COMPLETE IF KNOWN	
	Application Number	/
	Filing Date	concurrent herewith
	Group Art Unit	
	Examiner Name	

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

My residence, post office address, and citizenship are as stated below next to my name.

I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled:

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING CONSUMER REWARDS

the specification of which (Title of the Invention)

☒ is attached hereto

OR

☐ was filed on (MM/DD/YYYY) [] as United States Application Number or PCT International

Application Number [] and was amended on (MM/DD/YYYY) [] (if applicable).

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above identified specification, including the claims as amended specifically referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in 37 CFR 1.56

I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under 35 U.S.C. 119(a)-(d) or 365(b) of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate, or 365(a) of any PCT international application which designated at least one country other than the United States of America, listed below and have also identified below, by checking the box, any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate, or of any PCT international application having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed.

Prior Foreign Application Number(s)	Country	Foreign Filing Date (MM/DD/YYYY) Country	Priority Not Claimed	Certified Copy Attached?	
				YES	NO
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

☐ Additional foreign application numbers are listed on a supplemental priority data sheet PTO/SB/02B attached hereto:

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. 119(e) of any United States provisional application(s) listed below.

Application Number(s)	Filing Date (MM/DD/YYYY)	<input type="checkbox"/> Additional provisional application numbers are listed on a supplemental priority data sheet PTO/SB/02B attached hereto.
60/221,468	July 26, 2000	

[Page 1 of 2]

Burden Hour Statement: This form is estimated to take 0.4 hours to complete. Time will vary depending upon the needs of the individual case. Any comments on the amount of time you are required to complete this form should be sent to the Chief Information Officer, Patent and Trademark Office, Washington, DC 20231. DO NOT SEND FEES OR COMPLETED FORMS TO THIS ADDRESS. SEND TO: Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, DC 20231.

Please type a plus sign (+) inside this box → +

PTO/SB/01 (12-97)

Approved for use through 9/30/00. OMB 0651-0032

Patent and Trademark Office, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it contains a valid OMB control number.

DECLARATION — Utility or Design Patent Application

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. 120 of any United States application(s), or 365(c) of any PCT international application designating the United States of America, listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States or PCT International application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of 35 U.S.C. 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in 37 CFR 1.56 which became available between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT international filing date of this application.

U.S. Parent Application or PCT Parent Number	Parent Filing Date (MM/DD/YYYY)	Parent Patent Number (if applicable)

Additional U.S. or PCT international application numbers are listed on a supplemental priority data sheet PTO/SB/02B attached hereto.

As a named inventor, I hereby appoint the following registered practitioner(s) to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the

Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Customer Number 	→ Place Customer Number Bar Code Label here
OR <input type="checkbox"/> Registered practitioner(s) name/registration number listed below		

Name	Registration Number	Name	Registration Number

☐ Additional registered practitioner(s) named on supplemental Registered Practitioner Information sheet PTO/SB/02C attached hereto.

Direct all correspondence to: ☐ Customer Number or Bar Code Label OR ☒ Correspondence address below

Name	Gary R. Jarosik				
Address	Altheimer & Gray				
Address	10 S. Wacker Drive - Suite 4000				
City	Chicago	State	IL	ZIP	60606
Country	U.S.A.	Telephone	(312) 715-4000	Fax	(312) 715-4800

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under 18 U.S.C. 1001 and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

Name of Sole or First Inventor: ☐ A petition has been filed for this unsigned inventor

Given Name (first and middle (if any))		Family Name or Surname		
Frank F.		Schmeyer		
Inventor's Signature			Date	3/5/2001
Residence: City	State	Country	Citizenship	
Post Office Address				
Post Office Address				
City	State	ZIP	Country	

☐ Additional inventors are being named on the supplemental Additional Inventor(s) sheet(s) PTO/SB/02A attached hereto.

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING CONSUMER REWARDS

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application serial no. 09/802,082
5 filed on March 8, 2001, which claims the priority date of U.S. provisional patent application
serial no. 60/221,468 filed on July 26, 2000. These prior applications are incorporated herein
by reference in their entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] This invention relates generally to consumer reward or incentive programs and, more specifically, to a system and method for providing an automated consumer reward program.

5 [0003] In the prior art, various consumer reward programs are known. For example, the airline industry allows a consumer to make a plane reservation and to specify a frequent flyer number that is specific to the airline for which the reservation is made. In this manner, when the reservation is fulfilled by the consumer taking the reserved flight, the consumer is rewarded with redeemable frequent flyer miles. Such reservations can be made using a network, for example, the Internet, by phone, etc.

10 [0004] By way of further example, it is also known in the restaurant industry to provide a means by which consumers can make dining reservations and benefit from a rewards program. In this regard, reservations can be made via access to a Web site, such as www.opentable.com. Reservations made through “OpenTable” allow a consumer to earn “OpenTable points” that are redeemable for rewards. To earn the points, the consumer must
15 arrive at the restaurant before or at the reservation time and check in with the restaurateur who will then notify “OpenTable” of the reservation fulfillment. If the consumer fails to check in with the restaurateur, the consumer must mail a copy of the dining receipt to “OpenTable” within three months to notify “OpenTable” of the reservation fulfillment. For this service the restaurateur is charged a fee.

20 [0005] While the described systems work for their intended purpose, they do suffer various disadvantages. For example, the currently implemented airline consumer reward program requires the consumer to remember their appropriate frequent flyer number and to individually register with each of the airlines to access the large population of reward providers. Meanwhile, the on-line reservation system of “OpenTable” requires the

performance of some action by either the consumer or the restaurateur (beyond actual fulfillment of the reservation) to ensure the awarding of rewards. Accordingly, a need exists for an improved system and method for providing consumers rewards.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] In accordance with this need, the subject invention provides an automated consumer rewards/incentive program that requires minimal human intervention and which is substantially transparent to the consumer and to the business owner. To this end, the subject system and method accepts a registration of a consumer that entitles the consumer to receive the benefits of the incentive program. To track the fulfillment of reward earning criteria established by member businesses, the registration includes information indicative of a credit card of the consumer. The system uses the credit card information to determine when member customers perform a transaction at a member business. When a member customer performs a transaction at a member business using the registered credit card, the system and method examines the credit card transactional information to determine if the consumer fulfilled the requirements of the incentive program for the member business, e.g., purchased goods/services from a member business, fulfilled a reservation at a member business, etc. If the transactional information indicates that the consumer fulfilled the criteria of the rewards program of the member business, the consumer is rewarded in accordance with the benefits of the incentive program. The system and method also tracks and communicates information to members and businesses such as, for example, accumulated rewards, summaries of transactions and balances.

[0007] In a further embodiment of the invention, the system may be implemented on-line to leverage the functionality of the Internet. In this manner, the system provides a versatile tool for meeting a variety of needs of both consumers and businesses. For example, a business can use the Internet to change information in real-time using an online connection with the system.

[0008] A better understanding of the objects, advantages, features, properties and relationships of the invention will be obtained from the following detailed description and accompanying drawings which set forth an illustrative embodiment and which are indicative of the various ways in which the principles of the invention may be employed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] For a better understanding of the invention, reference may be had to a preferred embodiment shown in the following drawings in which:

5 [0010] Figure 1 illustrates a flow chart diagram of an exemplary system for determining consumer awards in accordance with the subject invention;

[0011] Figure 2 illustrates a block diagram of an exemplary network in which the principles of the subject invention may be employed;

[0012] Figures 3a-3e illustrate an exemplary Web page map for use in connection with the subject invention;

10 [0013] Figures 4a-4b illustrate data flow in the exemplary network illustrated in Fig. 2; and

[0014] Figure 5 illustrates a flow chart of an exemplary method for determining if an incentive has been met by a consumer.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0015] Turning now to the figures, wherein like reference numerals refer to like elements, there is illustrated a system and method for providing consumer rewards. While the invention is particularly described in the context of the restaurant business, it is to be understood that this description is exemplary only and is not meant to be limiting. As will be described in greater detail hereinafter, the subject system and method generally functions by capturing and processing credit card transactions originating from restaurants to thereby generate rebates and rewards for member consumers. The system and method also maintains member restaurant information, maintains member consumer information, and maintains audit trails.

[0016] To become eligible to participate in the rewards program, both consumers and restaurants register to become members. Restaurant registration will include a credit card merchant number, identification of a credit card point of sale machine, as well as the details of an awards program. Consumer registration will include a major credit card number.

When the consumer uses the registered credit card at a member restaurant, all or part of the credit card transaction information, e.g., credit card number, merchant identification information, purchase amount, day of transaction, time of transaction, etc, is examined to determine if the member consumer has dined at the member restaurant and, if so, whether the member consumer has fulfilled the requirements of the incentive program of the member restaurant. In exchange for becoming a member restaurant, a restaurant can allow the plan provider to derive income from the proceeds of the credit card transaction.

[0017] To provide an automated system that essentially eliminates the need for human intervention, the credit card transactional information is subjected to a two-tier filtration process as illustrated in Fig. 1. In one step, credit card transactions are filtered to determine

if a transaction took place at a member restaurant (e.g., by checking merchant identification numbers against a list of member merchant identification numbers). In another step, credit card transactions are filtered to determine if a transaction was made by a member consumer (e.g., by checking credit card numbers against a list of member consumer credit card

5 numbers). The illustrated steps can occur in any order. If the credit card transactional information indicates that a member consumer purchased goods or services from the member restaurant, the remaining credit card transactional information can be examined to determine if the transaction fulfills the criteria for receiving awards as established by the member restaurant.

10 **[0018]** While not required, the system and method described hereinafter seeks to maximize the potential of a network, such as the Internet, to change the relationship between restaurants and their customers. This goal is particularly achieved by building a comprehensive, dependable, and useful network resource that links businesses and consumers with sophisticated interactive marketing, yield management, and customer relationship
15 management capabilities. Both consumers and businesses will benefit from a centralized resource that combines unbiased information, an incentive program, and value-added activities such as online reservations and promotions to facilitate and enhance the experience of the consumer.

[0019] It will also be appreciated that various types of components can be utilized to achieve
20 the objects of the subject invention. For example, while the invention is described as including the components illustrated in Fig. 2, namely, a consumer computer 10, a restaurant computer 12, a merchant credit card reader 14, a credit card aggregator service server and associated database 16, and the Web site/rewards processing/reservation taking, etc. system

server and associated database 18, one of skill in the art will readily appreciate that other components and arrangements can be utilized. By way of example, while the operation of the invention is described in the general context of computer executable instructions, or program modules, being executed on the illustrated components, the tasks performed by these modules may also be performed by equivalent hardware. Still further, it is to be understood that the components illustrated in Fig. 2 are not intended to be limited to any particular type of computing device and may include hand-held devices, multiprocessor systems, microprocessor based or programmable consumer electronics, network PCs, minicomputers, mainframe computers, etc. With respect to the use of a network, the invention may be practiced in a distributed processing environment where tasks are performed by remote processing devices that are linked through a communications network. Alternatively, various of the components, such as the Web site system server and the credit card aggregator server, can be integrated on a single machine.

[0020] In accordance with the description that follows, the system and method will provide consumers with a one-stop shop approach to dining. Users will not only gain access to a trusted information resource on dining choices (listings, surveys, ratings, promotions) but also to a convenient tool for following through with their dining decisions by making reservations online. In addition, users will receive special incentives, such as money discounts or alternate currencies/points, when they dine at member restaurants. The trigger for awarding incentives will be transparent and accomplished via a registered credit card. The system and method may also be adapted to offer personalization, e.g., recommendations of restaurants based on past dining activities, etc., and premium member status.

[0021] To restaurants, the system and method is designed to become the dominant interactive partner. With a comprehensive focus on improving top and bottom lines of restaurants, the system and method will help restaurants market on a national scale, add marketing and promotional activity to the Internet and offer a completely new customer yield management tool, namely, variable dining incentives for the purpose of driving incremental traffic to member businesses. This tool will enable restaurants to post variable incentives, discounts or dining points, to stimulate demand during off-peak periods.

[0022] During operation, there will be two different types of users of the system. One type of user will be the consumer, who will use the site to perform restaurant searches, make dining reservations, etc. The other type of user is the restaurant. The restaurant will use the site to manage their reservations, dining incentive offerings and table allocation.

[0023] To maximize the functionality of the system, the system is adapted to provide for different levels of use by consumers and restaurants. Examples of different levels of use may include:

- Anonymous user – Can be either a consumer or a restaurateur. This user will not be recognized by the site but will be marketed to by offering different promotional opportunities to the user for increasing his level of participation on the site. This user can perform most functionality such as restaurant searches or reservations. However, this user will not have a “personalized” home page that will track the user’s pending reservations and dining history and will not be able to take advantage of the incentives offered by the different restaurants.

- Level 1 consumer – A level 1 user has accessed the system and has supplied the system with a name, e-mail address, zip code, user ID and password. This user will be acknowledged by the system and will have a “personalized” home page. The user will be able to use most all of the functionality offered by the site but will not be able to take advantage of the incentives offered by the different restaurants.

- Level 2 consumer – A level 2 user has accessed the system and has agreed to all of the requirements of the system. The user has provided the system with his credit card information along with the necessary billing information, and the required information for a Level 1 consumer. A level 2 consumer will be able to take full advantage of the site’s functionality including earning incentive points or dollars back by dining at participating restaurants. The level 2 consumer will have a “personalized” page that will track the user’s

pending reservations, the incentives that the consumer has registered for and any incentive points that the consumer has earned by dining.

- Type 0 restaurant – This is a restaurant that has not signed up to be a member of the system and method but is nevertheless listed in the restaurant search results.
- 5 • Type 1 restaurant – This is a restaurant that has signed up to be a member of the system and method interested only in editing its content page.
- Type 2 restaurant – A restaurant that has signed up to be a member of the system and method interested only in online reservations exclusive of an incentives program. Editable content regarding the restaurant will be available.
- 10 • Type 3 restaurant – A restaurant that has signed up to be a member of the system and method interested only in the incentives program exclusive of on-line reservations. Editable content regarding the restaurant will be available.
- Type 4 restaurant – A restaurant that has signed up to be a member of the system and method interested in both on-line reservations and incentives. Editable content regarding the restaurant will be available.
- 15 • Type 5 restaurant – a restaurant participating only in redemptions. The restaurant will accept member redemption at his restaurant but will not offer incentives.

[0024] When a user accesses the system via the Internet, without regard to their level of use, they will be given access to certain Web pages, retrieved from server 18, that will be tailored to meet the needs of the user.

[0025] With reference to Fig. 3a-3e, illustrating a Web page site map for use in connection with the subject system and method, the following Web pages can be made available to the user:

- “What’s New” – This is an area that provides the users information about new features of the system site, and press releases from the public.
- “Become a Registered Member” – This area will take the user to an area where he will enter personal account information in order to join the system. The preferred information that the system requests to move the user to a member is the user’s name, email address, zip code, user ID, password, credit card number and billing information. From this screen the user does not have to enter all information to become a member, but in order to be recognized as even a Level 1 consumer the user must enter his name, email address, zip code, user ID, password, and password hint/answer.

- “How iDine can bring the Restaurant and Consumer together” – This will be an area explaining to the consumer and the restaurant what the incentives program is and the benefits that are available to both the consumer and the restaurant.
- 5 • “Benefits” – This area will detail to the user the benefits of joining the programs provided by the system. It reviews the different levels of membership for both the restaurant and the consumer, it will provide consumer/restaurant testimonials, and details about the ability for a member to purchase a dining gift for another person. There will also be a link on this page to get the consumer user to create an account with the system.
- 10 • “Create a Personal Page” – This will be an area that is only available on the system home page to anonymous users. It will link the user to an area to enter account information, requiring the user’s name, email address, zip code, user ID, password, and password hint/answer. By giving the system this information the anonymous user will be promoted to a Level 1 consumer and will be a recognized user of the site.
- 15 • “I’m a Restaurant” – This area will link the user to an area that describes the benefits for a restaurant joining the programs provided by the system. It will also provide an area for the restaurant to request a visit from sales staff.
- “Login” – This area of the screen will provide an opportunity for a user, either a consumer or restaurant, to log into the site as a valid user.
- 20 • “Promotional Advertisement” – This will be an advertisement area that will make offers to users to join the system. An example of this would be “Just for visiting the site get 100 points. Click here for details on how to take advantage of this offer.” The rotation of these promotions may occur per user session.
- 25 • “Featured Restaurant” – The featured restaurant will be an advertisement for a member restaurant that is offering incentives to users that either are members or join the system. In the future it may also be incentives other than restaurant advertisements such as dinners with the chef and other opportunities. This restaurant may be picked to match as much of the consumer’s profile information as possible. An example of this will be if the user is an anonymous user but has visited the site before and has given his city/zip code to the system, a cookie will store the last geographic area searched on and this information will be used to
- 30 pick the featured restaurant that will be displayed.
- “Make a Reservation” – The user will be able to make a reservation at a restaurant whether or not he is a member of system. This selection will take the user to an area to perform a search for a restaurant.
- 35 • “Search for a Restaurant” – The user will be able to search for different restaurants based on the different user entered criteria.
- “Help” – This section will provide the user with some frequently asked questions and answers, an overall site map, contact numbers and a way to contact customer service with either a comment or question.

- “About” – This section will detail information about the system. It will cater to both the restaurant and consumer users of the site. It will provide the user a place to look at investor relation information, press releases, contact information, career opportunities available, and for the restaurants, information about having a sales representative contact them.

- 5 • “Registered Incentives Advertisement” – This area of the screen will provide the user of the site with advertisements for restaurants. These advertisements will be for incentive participating restaurants that are offering incentives for member customers to register for.

[0026] It may be preferred that the site follow the consumer through the Web pages so that

10 he/she has one-click access to the different opportunities.

[0027] To provide a secure login process for both consumers and restaurateurs, the system may check for a user ID and password and, if valid, will recognize the user with a personal page. The user’s access to the different programs of the site will be determined by the restrictions on his/her login. If the user cannot remember his/her password then he/she can

15 indicate this at the login screen and will be asked for a password hint. This password hint/answer should be a required field in the user’s account. If the user has a password hint, the system will ask the user the hint question and, if the correct answer is given, a message is shown to the user that his/her password will be sent to the email address that is listed in the user’s account.

20 [0028] When the anonymous user accesses the Web site he/she will be greeted by the home page that is described above. If the system knows that the user is a previous visitor of the site, for example by the use of a cookie, the system will display an advertisement to entice the user to become a member and try the programs provided by the system. Other than the advertisements, this is the only difference in the home page for each visit of the unregistered

25 user to the site.

[0029] When a registered consumer logs into the site, there will be an option for the site to remember his/her password. If the consumer chooses to have the system remember their

password the consumer will be recognized when returning to the site. Recognition may be accomplished with a greeting and tailored marketing, however, the user should still be required to give his/her password when trying to view any account information or history information. If the user does not want the site to remember his/her password, or does not set their browser accordingly, then, when the user access the Web site, he/she will be taken to the home page. From the home page the user will be able to log in and view their personalized content. If the user accessing the site is a restaurant, the user will be required to log into the site. Therefore, each time a restaurant access the system they will see the home page and will have to enter their password to access their personalized page. This is done for security purposes.

[0030] To manage all of the user's information, an account management module is provided. This module will manage each of the accounts in the database, both consumer and restaurant. It will manage all of the user's information, both the profile and account. To access the consumer or the restaurant account information the user must enter his/her password. This will occur even if the user has cookies enabled on his computer and has been recognized on the site.

[0031] To allow restaurants to be become members of the system, it is preferred that a restaurant be visited by the sales force and sign a contract indicating their type of membership. More specifically, there will be an area on the home page where the restaurants can access information about the programs provided by the system, enter some minor contact information about themselves, and request to be contacted by the sales department. This information will be returned to the system via e-mail. The creation of a restaurant account will be the responsibility of the sales force and customer service. However, once a restaurant

is established as a member on the system, the restaurant may gain access to and change their account information via a visit to the Internet site. For example, using the Internet access provided by the system a revenue management restaurant will be able to update their incentives and reservations information.

- 5 **[0032]** The sales representative will gather sales information about the restaurant and record this information. This information will be kept whether or not the restaurant signs up with the system. For member restaurants, after the initial account has been set up and entered into the database, the restaurant is given confirmation of their registration and verification of the restaurant's data in the database. The account information should be comprised of: 1) name
10 of restaurant; 2) name of contact; 3) address of restaurant; 4) phone number; 5) E-mail; 6) fax number; 7) number of seats; 8) price point (average price for a meal); 9) restaurant legal name; 10) tax ID; 11) credit cards that are accepted; 12) other billing information; 13) neighborhood; 14) cuisine; 15) atmosphere; 16) kid friendly; 17) handicap access; 18) cigar friendly; 19) hours of operation; 20) dress code; 21) entertainment; 22) takeout; 23) delivery; 24)
15 catering; 25) special awards; 26) long description (for home page); 27) user ID; 28) password and 29) password hint/answer.

- [0033]** While restaurants will have access to the system via the Internet, it is preferable that the restaurants not be able to delete their account online. Rather, the deletion of accounts should be performed by a customer service representative. Nevertheless, when an account is
20 deleted, all data will be maintained and the account's status will be changed to inactive.

[0034] To provide an added level of security, the system will require the user to change the password at first login. The user id will be permanent, but the password can be changed as often as needed. The Restaurant can change their password by accessing their

account/profile information on the personalized page. To change the password, a page will be displayed that will ask for the restaurateur's current password, for the new password, and a confirmation of the new password. The restaurant can also change their email address by accessing their account/profile information on the personalized page.

- 5 **[0035]** For providing additional information that may assist a restaurateur to better understand their business, the system may be configured to provide the restaurateur with information, such as system usage/feedback information, based upon a restaurant profile. This profile is generally created by posing the following questions to the restaurateur: 1) do you want to receive reviews/feedback from member customers; 2) do you have a profile
- 10 preference for these potential reviewers; 3) do you have a computer; where is this computer located; 4) do you have Internet access; 5) do you use a customer data management system; 6) do you take reservations by fax/Internet browser; 7) what are the best times to contact; 8) how the restaurant wishes to be contacted (phone, email, in person); 9) what are gross sales; and 10) do you use a restaurant management system?
- 15 **[0036]** For maintaining the restaurant's content page, a module is provided to allow individual restaurants to view their content information. Content information is most of the data that will be displayed on the restaurant's home page. For example, the restaurant menu will be considered content information. In one embodiment, merchant services will scan the menu(s) for the restaurant for display on the Internet site. If the restaurateur wants to change
- 20 the menus or the pictures of the restaurant--the process will be to go through merchant services via email or a phone call. When displaying the restaurant's home page, it is preferred that the home page have a predefined format since it is easier for the consumer to view restaurant pages on the Web site if the layout is predictable. In this regard, the

restaurant's content page(s) should consist of some or all of these items: 1) the restaurant's contact information (address, phone number, fax number) – from the restaurant's account information; 2) hours of operation - from the restaurant's account information; 3) photographs of the restaurant; 4) scanned in food menu; 5) scanned in wine list; 6) map to restaurant; 7) registered incentives; 8) base incentives; 9) reviews; 10) if the restaurant takes online reservations; and 11) if the restaurant takes reservations.

[0037] For creating a customer account, the system includes a consumer's account module. When the customer either creates a "personalized" page or joins the system as a member a consumer account will be created. The consumer will be allowed to view, but preferably not be allowed to update, the information in their personal account directly via the Internet. It is preferred that updates to the consumer account be handled via an email or phone call to customer service. The consumer account consists of at least: name, email address, zip code, user ID, password, password hint/answer. The member account (level 2) consists of the above personal account information plus: address, phone number, and credit card number(s). Verification will be run on the credit card information. A level 2 consumer who requests removal of his credit card information will temporarily give-up membership status. This action will move the consumer from a Level 2 to a Level 1 consumer and will not allow usage of the incentive program without re-registering a credit card number.

[0038] In addition to the consumer account information noted above, profile information about the consumers will be asked for/volunteered during sign-up for a personal page and member registration. In addition, the system, via cookies, will keep track of what geographic areas the consumer searches for restaurants in and will use this to drive personalization in the future. This profile information may be used to enhance the consumer's enjoyment of the

system by, for example, sending the consumer promotional materials for which the consumer has indicated an interest. The profile information may consist of some or all of the following: 1) price range; 2) cities that are visited often; 3) neighborhood/location; 4) typical credit card used; 5) cuisine preferences; 6) send me emails alerting me to special deals; 7) frequent flyer program memberships; 8) use of the services such as limousine, valet parking, travel agent, rental cars, hotel frequency programs; 9) household income, profession; 10) frequency of business dining; 11) use of dining membership benefits (business, celebrations, holidays, every time I dine, etc.); 12) send me emails about new restaurants in my area (and my favorite areas); 13) loyalty program number(s) – Frequent flyer numbers, hotel card numbers, etc; 14) dine out most often alone, with friends or family, with children; 15) send me email to review or give feedback to restaurants where you have recently visited; 16) types of marketing would you like to receive; 17) types of promotions preferred, such as alternate currencies per dollar spent or a percentage off the meal; and 18) important dates. The important dates and a description of these dates (e.g. birthdays) will allow the system to drive aspects of the personalization. The sending of emails would be managed by the system.

[0039] To provide for customization of the system Web pages to the specific user, the consumer profile may be utilized. For example, the system will create a personalized page for its Level 1 and 2 consumer. The customized page may offer marketing that will eventually be targeted to the consumer's account and profile information. Other personalization features may include: consumer's name, localized restaurants and some level of promotion and incentive segregation. When created, the personalized page will be used as the default home page for the user whenever he accesses the system Web site. It will

contain functionality options that have been carried over from the home page plus some personalization as described above.

[0040] It is contemplated that personal pages could be created without the consumer's direct knowledge. For example, when the consumer requests to get a benefit from a restaurant his name and e-mail address is required. By entering this information the anonymous consumer has just been promoted to a Level 1 consumer and will, by default, have a customized page.

[0041] In a preferred embodiment, the personalized page should contain the following:

- My Dining Plans – This section will give the consumer an overview of his pending reservations and registered incentives. It will show a maximum of five reservations with the option that the consumer can one-click in to a more expanded list. For each reservation the consumer will be shown the restaurant's name, the time and the date of the reservation. The consumer will be able to select the individual reservations and be given even more details of the reservation and the ability to cancel or edit it.

- New in Area – This area of the site will give a listing of the restaurants that are new to the consumer's area. The area will be defined by the zip code on the consumer's account and the definition of "new" will be defined by customer service.

- My Account – This area of the site will show the consumer a summarization of the total amount of incentive points, etc. he has collected by participating in the system. The view may include a view of the consumer's historical transactions or allow the consumer to view his registered cards. Basic account information should be available for viewing only (level 1 required info as described above).

- Redeem Points – In this area the consumer will be able to redeem his incentive points for dining vouchers, frequent flyer miles, or other rewards. This may be handled via an email form to customer service release.

[0042] Turning now to the restaurant personal page, the purpose of the restaurant personal page is different from the consumer's personal page in that it is intended to be purely functional. The restaurant will be accessing this page for the purpose of managing their reservations, incentives or seating allocation. With this in mind, the restaurant's personal page may be presented in a tabular format. Each tab on the page will represent different functionality that is available to the restaurant, such as:

- My Reservations – In this area the restaurant will be able to manage the reservation book and table allocation. The restaurant will be allowed to view the different reservations that have been made at the restaurant and get more detailed information about the reservation including comments made by the person who made the reservation. This is also where the restaurant can add comments to the consumer who made the reservation for future use.
- My Benefits – This section will detail the benefits that the restaurant receives by using the incentive or the online reservation program and details the current benefits that the restaurant is entitled to.
- My Promotions/Incentives – In this section the restaurant can view and edit their incentive program. This includes both the base and the registered incentives.
- My Account/Profile – From this section the restaurant can view their account information and change their password or email account. There will be an area for the restaurant to contact a sales representative or merchant services to update other entries. The restaurant can also view their content page, which will consist of both menus and pictures of the restaurant.
- Contact a Sales Representative.
- My Customers – This is where the restaurant can see any reviews that pass the webmaster's edits.

[0043] As a user aide, there may be a help menu on the left side of the web page that will summarize the functionality of each tabbed section. This will give the restaurants an overview of what can be done on the site and help them by providing links to key areas.

[0044] To handle any actions that can be performed by both consumers and restaurants, an all account relations management module is provided. One such action is the providing of user feedback about the system to the system administration. Both restaurants and consumers will have the ability to provide feedback from the Help menu on any of the site pages. This feedback will be received by the system administration and confirmed by email.

[0045] Another function available to consumers and restaurants is contacting customer service. Both the consumer and the restaurant will have the ability to contact the systems' customer service with either a comment or a question. This can be done via the Help menu that will be located on all site pages.

[0046] For use in creating and storing consumer reviews, a create review module is provided.

This module will allow consumers to create and store the consumer reviews for the restaurant and other relationship management actions. A review is consumer generated information about a restaurant that may be made available to all visitors of the system site. To create a

5 review, a consumer will perform a search and then click through a restaurant's home page.

There will no limit on the number of reviews that a consumer can create on one restaurant.

The review will be a very simple template that will consist of ratings (i.e. likeability scale, food quality, etc...) and a comment section. The ratings information and the comment

information will be viewed as two separate things by the system. The consumer's rating

10 information may be simply stored without review. However, if the consumer enters text in the comment section, it is preferred that the consumer's comments edited if necessary before being posted into the restaurant's account. In this regard, there will be informational messages to tell the user that, if comments are entered, the text must go through a review process prior to being posted to the site.

15 **[0047]** After performing a restaurant search of any type, be it for making a reservation or performing a general search, the consumer will be able to read the reviews that have been posted for a selected restaurant by other consumers. These reviews will initially consist of an overall rating, indicating an average rating and the number of people that were averaged in, and textual comments. The comment reviews may be ranked by the amount of information

20 available about the person giving the review. For example, if the person giving the review has an associated dining experience at the restaurant they will be listed first. If there is no information on the person giving the review, except the name and email address, it will be listed last. While restaurants may use this method to also view reviews which are written

about their restaurant, the system will make such reviews available on the restaurant's personal page. Reviews and descriptions from third party sources may also be made available.

[0048] To enhance the desire to use the system, the system will provide an incentive

5 management module. This module will manage the types and amounts of incentive given to the consumer for dining at particular restaurants. On a dynamic basis, restaurateurs can create/update/delete incentives. Incentives include alternate currencies per dollar spent, a percent off the bill total, etc. These incentives can be managed either on-line by the restaurateur or they can call a system sales representative. It is also contemplated that a
10 voice response system may be used for restaurateurs to update incentives.

[0049] In a preferred embodiment, there will be two types of incentives that can be offered to the consumer. The first is a base incentive, which will be offered on a daily basis and does not require the consumer to register acceptance of the offer with the system or make an online reservation. The second type of incentive is a registered incentive that requires the
15 consumer to register an intent to dine or to make an online reservation. Restaurants can choose to offer any combination of these incentives, to be offered at anytime of the week, or no incentives at all. Once a consumer has made a reservation or has registered for the incentive the incentive is locked in, and the conditions of the registered incentive can not be changed. Restaurateurs will be able to modify registered incentives as needed, however, base
20 incentives should only be updated seven days prior to the set incentive date. For example, if a restaurateur wants to update the next week's base incentives he should do it before the Monday of the current week.

[0050] To provide a convenient means for allowing restauranteurs to sign up for the incentive plan, a description and the benefits of the restaurant incentives program can be viewed online or be explained by a sales representative. If the restaurant requests, a sales representative can come out to the restaurant to describe how the program works and the

5 benefits to joining the program. Once the restaurant has decided to join the systems' incentives program, a sales representative will meet with the restaurateur to discuss and decide on the terms of the agreement which will be agreed upon, and printed contract will be signed. The sales representative will ensure the restaurant is added to the system database and is properly designated as a restaurant being signed up with incentives. Base incentives
10 may be initialized to a predetermined amount. Thereafter, the default effective date on the base incentive may be 10 days after the date the restaurant receives incentives to provide the restaurant a window to change their default base incentives before they go into effect.

[0051] Base incentives will be stored at the day level along with an effective date. When updating a restaurant's base incentives, a business rule (which the web administrator can

15 change) will resolve any conflicts. As an example of a rule, given that there may be updates to the base incentives over time, the active base incentive may be designated to be the one with the highest effective date that is less than or equal to the current date.

TABLE 1: BASE INCENTIVE EXAMPLE

Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	Effective Date
10%	20%	20%	10%				1/1/2000
15%	20%	20%					3/1/2000
20%	20%	20%	20%	10%	10%	10%	6/1/2000

[0052] In the example illustrated in TABLE 1, the active base incentive would be the record
20 with the effective date of '3/1/2000' on the date 5/25/00.

[0053] To ensure that consumers have ample time in viewing and understanding restaurants' base discounts, restaurants should give consumers seven days prior notice of changes of their base incentives. The restaurants can enter as many base incentive records as they would like as long as the effective date is greater than seven days from the current date. Furthermore, pre-defined black-out days may be offered by the system in a drop-down menu format. Black-out days—if selected—will over-ride the base incentive for the day. They will be listed in the “base incentive” explanation for each restaurant that chooses black-out days. The consumer will be able to tell in advance if a black-out day has been chosen by a restaurant.

[0054] After a restaurateur has signed up for incentives they have the ability to make changes to their registered incentives any time they want via the internet or over the phone with a customer service or sales representative. Registered incentives will be stored at the day level along with an effective date and expiration date. Restaurants are not required to have registered incentives. Registered incentives may be given in addition to any base incentives that a consumer might receive.

[0055] At any single point in time a restaurant can only have one active registered incentive record. This is enforced by ensuring that an incentive record can not have an effective date that is less than another incentive record's expiration date and also greater than that same record's effective date. The restaurant will also specify the maximum number of times they are willing to extend the registered promotional incentive per any given day.

TABLE 2: EXAMPLE OF INCENTIVE RECORDS

Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	Effective Date-	Expire Date	Max. Offers
			10%				1/1/2000	3/1/2000	5
			15%				3/1/2000	6/1/2000	5
			20%				6/1/2000		5

[0056] In the scenario presented in Table 2, the active registered incentive would be 15% off on all Thursdays until 6/1/2000 when it goes up to 20% off. The restaurateur can change their registered incentives at any time, but once a customer has made a valid reservation or has registered for the incentive (made an “intent to dine”) the incentive is locked in, and the amount can not be changed for that particular consumer. Once the maximum number of consumers have validly registered their intent to take advantage of the incentive on any given day, the incentive will no longer be offered on that day.

[0057] As a further incentive, points may be accumulated through dining experiences which can be redeemed for electronic dining vouchers, frequent flyer miles, etc. With respect to dining vouchers, the amounts may be in increments, for example, of \$25.00 with the smallest amount being \$25.00. The assumption will be that any amount of the voucher that the consumer does not use on his meal is lost. The number of points required to purchase a voucher may be dynamic and may be determined by a business rule which takes into account the type of restaurant and the day-of-the-week. By way of example, the cost of a voucher will depend on whether the diner wishes to dine during off-peak hours (5,000 points = \$100 voucher) or peak hours (6,500 points = \$100 voucher). Each restaurant will indicate peak and off peak times. The consumer must specify the name of the restaurant where the voucher will be used and the date that the voucher will be used. There will be a link to the online reservation page of the site from this part of the application. A confirmation of the

redemption will be sent to the consumer after the redemption transaction is completed, and the consumer's customized page will indicate existing and unused redemption points.

[0058] To redeem incentive points, consumers will be able to view their total points from the consumer's personal page and select the option to redeem their points for dining vouchers.

- 5 Once the user has selected the option to redeem their points, they will be taken to a new page where they can select from a drop down list of predefined dining vouchers, such as "Dinner for 2, up to \$100." Next the consumer will select the day of the week and the restaurant where the diner will occur. Depending on whether the restaurant has defined the preferred day of the week as off-peak or peak will effect the number of points needed to earn the
- 10 dining voucher. The restaurant selected must be a Level 3, Level 4, or Level 5 restaurant. A search will be offered to help the user in selecting a participating restaurant. If the restaurant allows reservations one can be made at this time, or a later date.

[0059] Upon submitting their dining voucher request, the system performs a validation to ensure the user has enough points to honor the request. If the user does not have enough

- 15 points the system them will help make a dining voucher match by offering the user an alternative restaurant or day to dine. Upon the successful redemption of points, a confirmation will be sent to the user confirming the amount of the virtual voucher, the restaurant and day of the week it is good for, and a voucher unique tracking number. If the voucher is redeemed for less than the voucher's dollar amount, then the operators of the
- 20 system will be credited with the dollar balance. If the consumer does not use the dining voucher by dining on the chosen date and at the chosen restaurant, then his/her voucher will expire and their points will revert back to their point bank.

[0060] To view the incentives that restaurants are offering, the user can access the information by looking at the restaurant's personal page. There will be a link from the page to this information. Alternatively, when making a reservation (selecting the time, number in party, etc...) the consumer can choose to view the incentives offered by the restaurant. Still
5 further, the user can click through one of the rotating "restaurant incentives" ads and be taken to the restaurant's personal page to view the incentives. Thereafter, the consumer can register for a promotional incentive in several different ways: 1) by clicking through an ad in the rotating "restaurant incentive" banner and then accepting the offer with a click on "yes"; 2) by performing a biased search for the registered incentives on restaurants, viewing the
10 registered incentive and then clicking "accept" on a particular incentive to select it; and 3) by performing a regular search on a restaurant, viewing the registered incentive and then clicking on "accept."

[0061] If the consumer has not given the system their credit card information they will be required to do so before they can register for the promotional incentive. Also, in order to
15 take advantage of a registered incentive a date the user intends to dine must be provided by the user. If the promotion is still available on that day the consumer will be registered for the incentive, otherwise he/she will be notified that the promotion is full on their intended dining date and will be offered the next available registered incentive. The consumer will be able to view his/her registered incentives on their personal page. All future dining experiences, both
20 registered incentives and reservations will be listed together and can be easily viewed on the consumer's personal page.

[0062] To assist in taking online reservations, the system includes a reservation book that is created and updated with those reservations that are made through the system. The

reservation book will keep track of the number of open seats available in a restaurant and will re-open tables after a reservation has been made if the restaurant wants to keep a fixed number of tables open online. The restaurant may specify the total number of tables in the restaurant that are to be included in the system database and then choose a number of these
5 tables as eligible for online reservations. The tables will be allocated by percentages or raw numbers and may also be allocated by day of the week. For example, Monday may have 5% of the tables allocated for online reservation but Tuesday has 10%. The minimum number of tables that can be allocated for online reservation is one. Table allocation can be changed using a browser and interacting with a system account or by calling or faxing a system
10 administrator and asking for help with setting up or updating the online reservation service. In this manner, the restaurateur may manage the number of seats that are available to the consumer online at any time thereby providing for real time adjustment.

[0063] When an online reservation is made, the restaurants will be notified when a table in their restaurant has been reserved. This may be done via the Restaurant's system account,
15 on-line, phone, or by fax. The information that the restaurant will receive should be the customer's name, the number in the party, the time, their smoking preference, any comments that have been made by the consumer regarding his reservation and a tracking number. The restaurant will also have the ability to add comments to the consumer's reservation. These comments will be displayed for the restaurant along with the consumer's current reservation
20 information at his next reservation at this restaurant.

[0064] To obtain an online reservation, a consumer need only click on an online reservations icon that is displayed next to a desired restaurant. The consumer will be required to enter the date and time of the reservation, the number in the dining party and the smoking preference.

If the consumer selects the “Make a Reservation” heading, a search page will be presented with the above information requested, as well as an option for the consumer to search for all available reservations, for the chosen date/time, for all restaurants defined by the search area.

For example, the consumer selects “Make a Reservation,” enters March 26 at 7:00 p.m. as

5 the date and time of the dine and chooses to see all available reservations. The consumer will be required to define an area (city/state, zip proximity, or state/neighborhood) to perform the search. Once the consumer chooses an area, the consumer can further limit the search by choosing the cuisine of the restaurant. The search will return all available reservations for March 26 at 7:00 p.m., for all restaurants within the chosen area and with the chosen cuisine.

10 The consumer then chooses one of these restaurants from the list to complete the reservation. The consumer does not have to be a member of the system to make a reservation but incentives will be contingent on membership.

[0065] If there is a reservation available at the restaurant, a message will be displayed offering the consumer the time desired plus two alternate times (one at least 15 minutes

15 before the desired time and one at least 15 minutes after the desired time). The consumer can then confirm to reserve the table. However, if no reservation at the desired time is available, alternate times that night will be shown and the consumer will also be given the opportunity to perform a search for restaurants with open reservations at the desired time. Once the reservation is made the consumer will have the option to send the restaurant and reservation
20 information to a friend via email.

[0066] One preferred constraint to the online reservation is that a consumer is not allowed to make more than three reservations on a given night or within a 4 hour time period. There will also be a warning message shown to the user if he makes a reservation that either

conflicts or is within the four-hour window. The user can override this message. The consumer will be reminded the day of the reservation of the existence of reservations at conflicting times.

[0067] If the consumer chooses not to show up for a reservation made at a restaurant online then a record may be kept of the number of no-shows for this consumer and he/she runs the risk of losing the online reservation privilege. The restaurant can also require that the consumer enter a credit card number and expiration date explaining that a no-show will result in a monetary penalty. The charge penalty for a no-show will be the responsibility of the restaurant.

[0068] To avoid no-shows, the consumer may be sent an e-mail reminder of the reservation on the day of the reservation. On the consumer's personal page there will also be an area for the consumer to view his pending reservations, a link to more detail about the reservation and the ability to update or delete the reservation. The reservation can be edited up to one hour before the reservation time subject to the availability of inventory.

[0069] To search for restaurants at which to dine, a search may be performed that will return to the consumer a list of the restaurants that match the criteria. A short description of the restaurants may also be provided. If the restaurant participates as a system member that takes online reservations, then the consumer can make an online reservation or link to the restaurant's personal page.

[0070] More specifically, the consumer can search based upon the following criteria:

- Search on the area where the restaurant is located. This requires that the consumer enter the state and location information to use in the search. The location information will be the city and neighborhood to search.

- Search on proximity of the restaurant to a given zip code. The default zip code will be the consumer's account zip code. The consumer will be able to select the number of miles from a list of 5 miles, 10 miles or 15 miles.

5 • Search on detailed information about the restaurant. The consumer will be required to enter the city and state to search in. Optional information will be the name of the restaurant.

- Search on the restaurant's area code (use area code/location bar translation)

- Enter the restaurant name directly to search on a pattern match

- Cuisine

- Promotions/incentives

10 • Credit Cards accepted

- Price Range

- Reservation availability(both online and not online)

- Membership in the system

[0071] Performing the search will give the consumer a list of the restaurants that match the

15 criteria, a short description of the restaurant and an icon for each relevant content item held by the system for the restaurant (accepts online reservations, has a map, offers

base/registered incentives, online menu, etc.). In addition, if the consumer is recognized by the Web site as a Level 1 and above consumer, and the restaurant is a member of the system,

then a checkbox will appear allowing the restaurant to be added to the consumer's favorite

20 restaurant list. The checkbox will also indicate if the restaurant is already on the list. This

checkbox can be toggled to indicate that it is not to be included as a favorite restaurant. The results of the search will be unbiased and in alphabetical order unless the consumer chooses

to perform a "biased" search, one that gives preferential treatment to member restaurants, by selecting a checkbox that will appear on the search form. Also, if the Consumer has

25 performed a search by proximity the restaurants will be listed by nearest to farthest.

[0072] After the search has completed there may also be provided a link to a more detailed page for the restaurant. Listed on this page are consumer reviews, the ability to send the information on this restaurant to anyone via email, and the ability for the consumer to perform another search that returns the consumer to the detailed search page. The detailed page may also include pictures of the restaurant and links to the restaurant's menus. If the restaurant belongs to the system and has elected to have online reservations, then the consumer will be able to access that restaurant's online reservation book to make an online reservation or link to the restaurant's content page. The consumer will also be able to send the results of the restaurant search to a friend simply by providing the email address that he would like to send it to.

[0073] To validate when rewards are earned, a credit card transaction aggregator 16 is utilized that matches credit card charges at member restaurants with credit card account numbers of enrolled members. The information returned from the credit card transaction aggregator 16 is compared with enrollment and updated information stored in the database associated with server 18. With reference to the data flow diagrams of Figs. 4a and 4b, the process proceeds with the system sending enrollments and redemption/incentive transactions to the database 18. The system also sends a daily file of registered credit cards and participating merchant numbers to the credit card transaction aggregator 16. The credit card transaction aggregator 16 compares information received from the system with the daily file, which includes information that is representative of registered credit cards and participating merchant numbers and matched transactions are forwarded to the server 18. A further verification can take place at the server 18 to ensure that the merchant number and/or

frequent diner registered card contained in the record returned from the credit card

transaction aggregator 16 are participating members.

[0074] If a match has occurred, one of the following types of activities has been launched:

- 5 • frequent diner acceptance of restaurant registered incentives – when a frequent diner signals his intent to accept a restaurant’s registered incentive offer by clicking through the acceptance path and completing the required information, a registered incentive transaction is maintained in a daily transaction file. A registered incentive is valid for a particular day at a particular restaurant and may be restricted to a restaurant-determined number of tables. Frequent diners who attempt to register may find they exceeded the number of tables the
10 restaurant is offering. In such a case, a message indicating that there are no more tables available for this offer on the particular day is sent - highlighting the scarcity of the offer and encouraging more timely responsiveness in the future by the frequent diner. The key used to link a matched transaction from the credit card transaction aggregator to a pending, registered incentive is the merchant number and frequent diner credit card. If there is a match on both
15 of these elements and a match between the registered incentive offer date and the transaction date, then the system creates a reward record for the member to be used in the reward delivery/qualification process, i.e., updates the customer’s alternate currency total or informs the credit card company to reduce the customer’s charges.

- 20 • merchant basic incentive offers – If a merchant chooses to set-up a basic incentive for a particular day, a daily file is maintained. The key used to link a matched transaction from the credit card transaction aggregator is the merchant number and frequent diner registered card which are verified as participating members. If the members are participating and the transaction date matches a basic incentive date, the frequent diner will get the basic incentive reward, i.e., the credit card company will be instructed to reduce the customer’s charge.

- 25 **[0075]** While the foregoing describes the basic features of the subject invention, additional features may be added that include online access to consumer and/or restaurant transaction history. For example, the Consumer may be able to view his points bank online. There may also be a link to contact customer service (via email or phone) so that the consumer can get historical transaction information, report any missing items or make comments.

- 30 **[0076]** As noted above, the subject system and method allows for a restaurant to set time of day/week/month dining incentives by which the consumer can obtain a reward for dining at an established incentive time. This is particularly advantageous to restaurants as the incentive plan may be used to entice diners at otherwise off-peak demand times within the

restaurant. To ensure that the rewards are awarded, as illustrated in Fig. 5, the restaurant notifies the system administrator of the time of day/week/month that the incentive is being offered and the details of the incentive. This information may then be communicated to consumers whereby a consumer can make a reservation through the system to dine at the member restaurant during the specified incentive time.

[0077] To determine that the consumer has fulfilled the reservation, the time stamp of the credit card transaction is compared against the time the reservation was made. For day of week or day of month incentives, this comparison need only examine the day field of the credit card transaction record to determine if the reservation was fulfilled during the incentive day. For time of day incentives, the comparison examines the day and time fields of the credit card transaction record to determine if the reservation was fulfilled during the incentive time of the incentive day.

[0078] To ensure that the fulfillment took place at approximately the time the reservation was made for time of day incentive plans, a time window is added to the reservation time and the credit card time field is examined to determine if it falls within this time window on the appropriate day. For example, a restaurant can offer incentives to a consumer if the consumer dines at the restaurant between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. on a Wednesday. If the consumer then makes a reservation for 5 p.m. on Wednesday the consumer is eligible for the incentive and the system will determine that the incentive has been earned if the meal is paid for using the registered credit card within a predetermined time window on the incentive day (e.g., using a 2 hour window the payment should occur between 5 p.m. - 7 p.m. if the reservation time was met by the consumer). It will be appreciated that the time window need not start at the reservation time but can start at some predetermined time after the reservation

time. In this manner, the system accounts for the time between the time of reservation and the time of payment, i.e., the time taken to seat the consumer at the restaurant, the time to eat the meal, etc.

[0079] While specific embodiments of the invention have been described in detail, it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that various modifications and alternatives to those details could be developed in light of the overall teachings of the disclosure. For example, all events (such as registration, changing restaurant rewards, changing reservations, making reservations, etc.) need not be performed via a computer network but can be accomplished by placing a phone call, sending a fax, etc. to a representative of the entity that manages the rewards program. This entity can similarly notify the participants by phone, fax, mail, etc. of changes in rewards offered, changes in reservations, to make reservations, etc. Accordingly, the particular arrangement disclosed is meant to be illustrative only and not limiting as to the scope of the invention which is to be given the full breadth of the appended claims and any equivalents thereof.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for allowing a member consumer to coordinate reservations and to receive benefits as defined by an incentive program offered by one of a plurality of member

5 businesses, the method comprising:

accepting via a computer network a registration of the member consumer entitling the member consumer to benefits as defined by the incentive program, the registration including information indicative of a credit card used by the member consumer;

10 comparing credit card transactional information representative of a plurality of transactions with the information indicative of the credit card used by the member consumer to determine if one of the transactions was performed by the member consumer at one of the plurality of member businesses, where the credit card transactional information is collected by a credit card processor;

15 rewarding the member consumer with benefits as defined by the incentive program if it is determined in the step of comparing that the member consumer did perform a transaction at one of the plurality of member businesses;

accepting one or more reservations from the member consumer to visit one of the plurality of member businesses;

transmitting benefit information to the member consumer for viewing; and

20 allowing the member consumer to redeem benefits.

2. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the benefit information may include information about incentive points.

3. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the incentive points may be redeemed for items selected from the group consisting of rebates, credits, currency, vouchers, frequent flyer miles, or other incentive rewards.
4. The method as recited in claim 3, wherein the information about the incentive points includes information indicative of an amount of incentive points available to the member consumer.
5. The method as recited in claim 3, wherein the information about the incentive points includes information indicative of when the incentive points were generated and the criteria by which the incentive points were generated.
- 10 6. The method as recited in claim 3, wherein the information about the incentive points includes information indicative of when the incentive points were used.
7. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the steps of transmitting reservation information to the member consumer for viewing and allowing the member consumer to manage reservations via the computer network.
- 15 8. The method as recited in claim 7, wherein the reservation is for an event selected from the group consisting of travel, theatre, dining, sporting events, hotel stay or vehicle rental.
9. The method as recited in claim 7, wherein the reservation information includes information specifying the day, time, member consumer and member business associated with each of the respective reservations.
- 20 10. A method for allowing a member business to coordinate reservations by member consumers and to manage benefits as defined by an incentive program offered by the member business, the method comprising:

accepting via a computer network a registration for each of the member consumers entitling the member consumers to benefits of the incentive program, the registration including information indicative of a credit card used by each of the member consumers;

5 comparing credit card transactional information representative of a plurality of transactions with the information indicative of the credit card used by each of the member consumers to determine if one of the transactions was performed by one of the member consumers at the member business, where the credit card transactional information is collected by a credit card processor;

10 rewarding member consumers with benefits as defined by the incentive program if it is determined in the step of comparing that one of the member consumers did perform a transaction at the member business;

transmitting benefit information to the member business for viewing; and

allowing the member business to change the benefits of the incentive program by modifying criteria for rewarding member consumers with benefits.

15 11. The method as recited in claim 10, wherein the benefit information may include information about incentive points.

12. The method as recited in claim 11, wherein the incentive points may be redeemed for items selected from the group consisting of rebates, credits, currency, vouchers, frequent flyer miles, or other incentive rewards.

20 13. The method as recited in claim 12, wherein the information about the incentive points includes information indicative of an amount incentive points available to each of the member consumers.

13. The method as recited in claim 12, wherein the information about the incentive points includes information indicative of when the incentive points were generated, the criteria by which the incentive points were generated, and when the incentive points were used.

14. The method as recited in claim 12, wherein the information about the benefits
5 includes information about whether the benefits are rewarded in connection with base incentives or registered incentives.

15. The method as recited in claim 10, further comprising the steps of accepting reservations to visit the member business from the member consumers, transmitting reservation information to the member business for viewing, and allowing the member
10 business to manage the reservations by the member consumers via the computer network.

16. The method as recited in claim 15, wherein the reservations are for an event selected from the group consisting of travel, theatre, dining, sporting events, hotel stay or vehicle rental.

17. The method as recited in claim 15, wherein the reservation information includes
15 information specifying the day, time, member consumer and member business associated with each of the respective reservations.

18. A computer-readable media having instructions for determining if a transaction by a member consumer meets one or more requirements of an incentive program of a member business and if the transaction does meet one or more requirements of the incentive program,
20 for providing benefits associated with the incentive program to the member consumer, the instructions performing steps comprising:

receiving transaction information including information identifying a plurality of consumers where at least one of the consumers is not the member consumer, information

identifying a plurality of businesses where at least one of the businesses is not one of the member businesses, information pertaining to the purchase of goods or services by each of the plurality of consumers at one of the businesses and information identifying the respective business at which the purchase of goods or services was effectuated;

5 determining if one of the consumers identified in the transaction information is the member consumer;

 determining if one of the businesses identified in the transaction information is one of the member businesses;

 if it is determined that the consumer is the member consumer and the business is one
10 of the member businesses, rewarding the member consumer with incentive points in accordance with the requirements of the incentive program for the respective member business and populating a database with information about the incentive points that have accrued to the member consumer;

 transmitting via the computer network information about the incentive points and
15 benefits of the incentive program to the member consumer for viewing; and

 allowing the member consumer to redeem benefits and incentive points via the computer network.

19. The computer-readable media as recited in claim 18, wherein the information
20 identifying the plurality of consumers includes a credit card number for each of the consumers.

20. The computer-readable media as recited in claim 19, wherein the information identifying each of the businesses is compared against a list of member businesses to determine if the business is one of the member businesses and the credit card number of the

customer is compared against a list of credit card numbers of member consumers to determine if the consumer is the member consumer.

21. The computer-readable media as recited in claim 19, wherein the transaction information is collected by a credit card processor.

5 22. The method as recited in claim 19, wherein the information about the incentive points includes information indicative of the amount incentive points available to the member consumer.

23. The method as recited in claim 19, wherein the information about the incentive points includes information indicative of when the incentive points were generated.

10 24. The method as recited in claim 19, wherein the information about the incentive points includes information indicative of when the incentive points were used.

ABSTRACT

[0080] An automated consumer rewards/incentive program that accepts a registration of a consumer. The registration entitles the consumer to receive the benefits of the incentive program. To track the fulfillment of reward earning criteria established by member
5 businesses, the registration includes information indicative of a credit card of the consumer. The system uses the credit card information to determine when member customers perform a transaction at a member business. When a member customer performs a transaction at a member business using the registered credit card, the system and method examines the credit card transactional information to determine if the consumer fulfilled the requirements of the
10 incentive program for the member business. If the transactional information indicates that the consumer fulfilled the criteria of the rewards program of the member business, the consumer is rewarded in accordance with the benefits of the incentive program.

NGEDOCS: 1425392.2

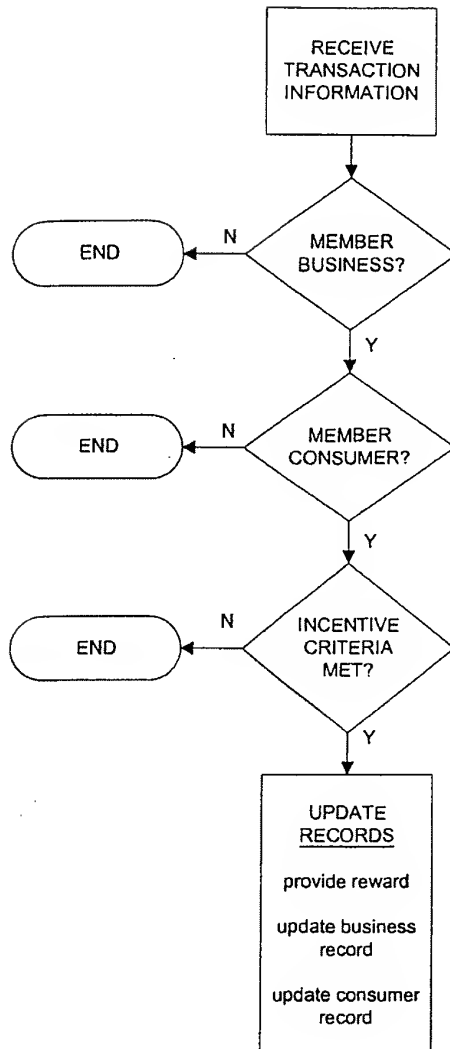


FIG. 1

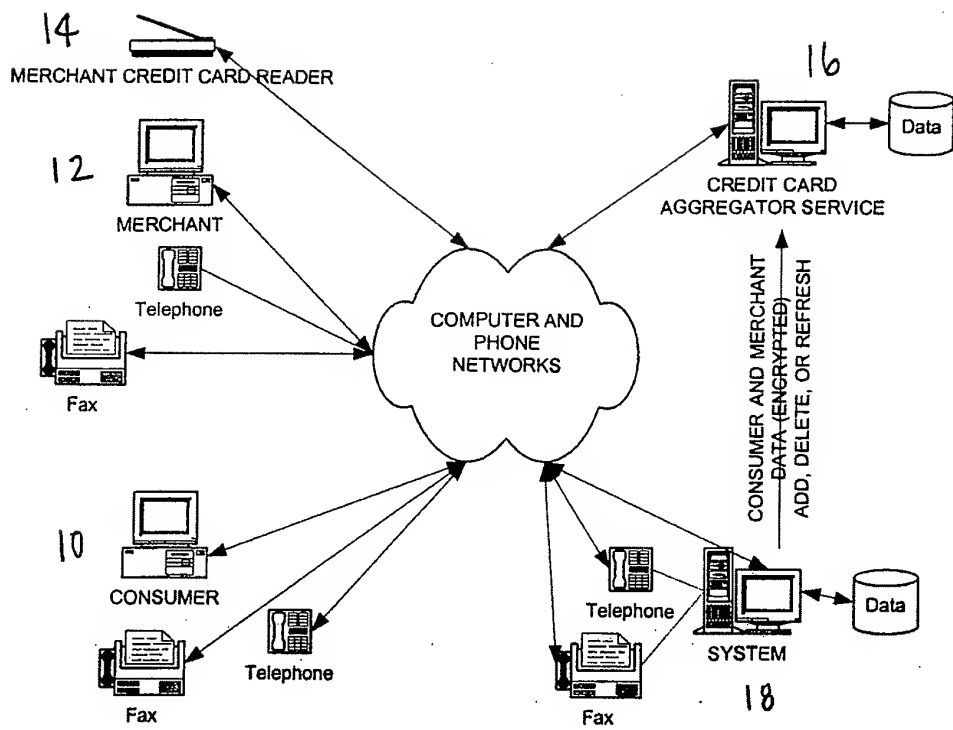


FIG. 2

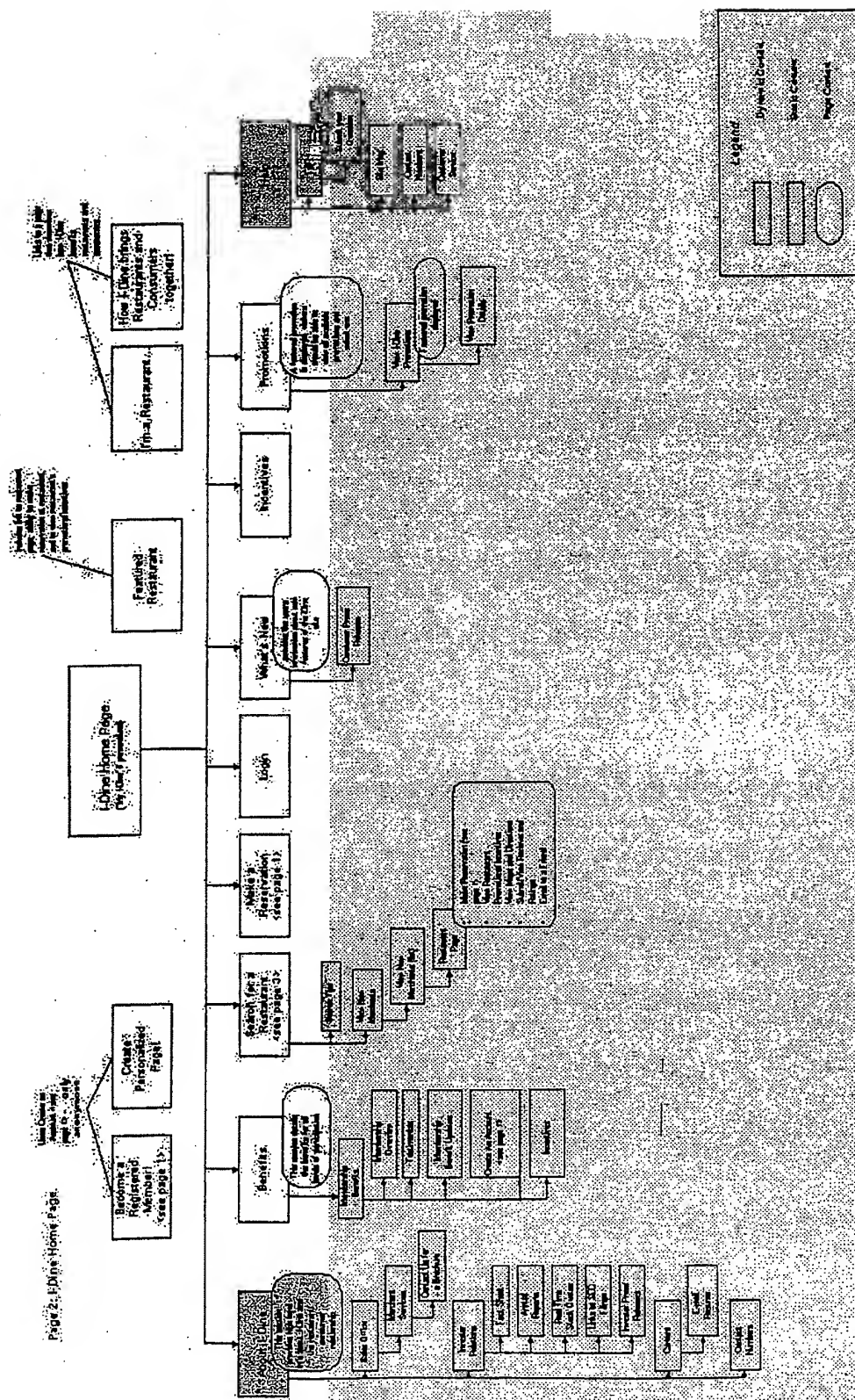
$$1-D_{ine} = i_{bine}$$


FIG. 3a

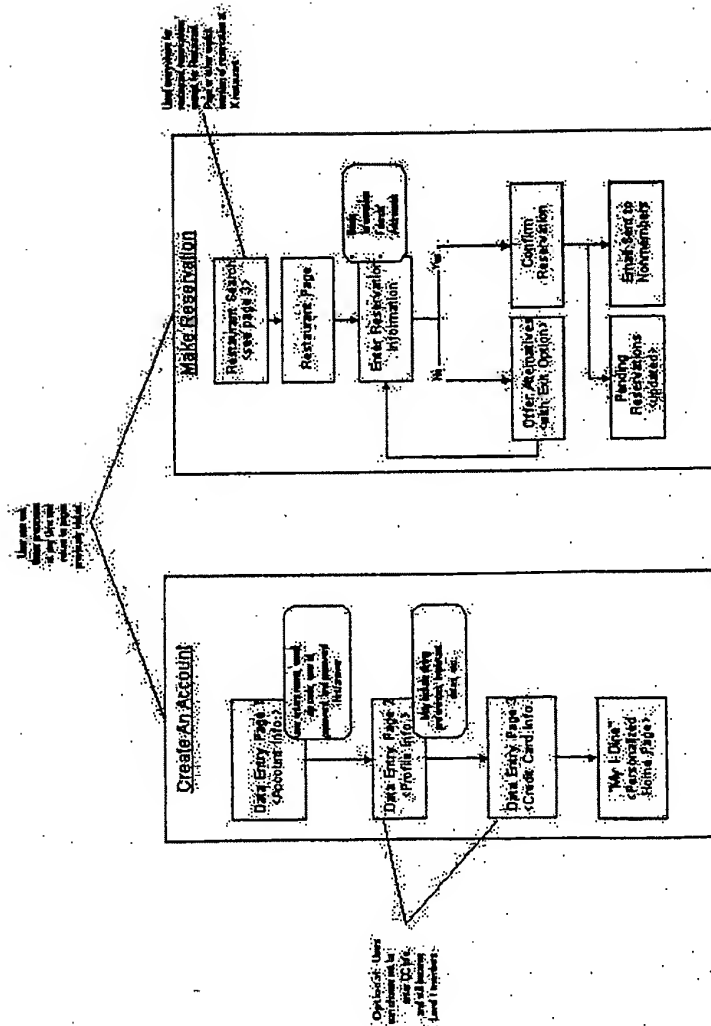
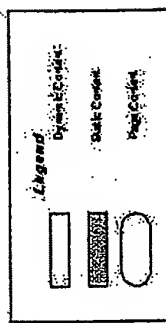
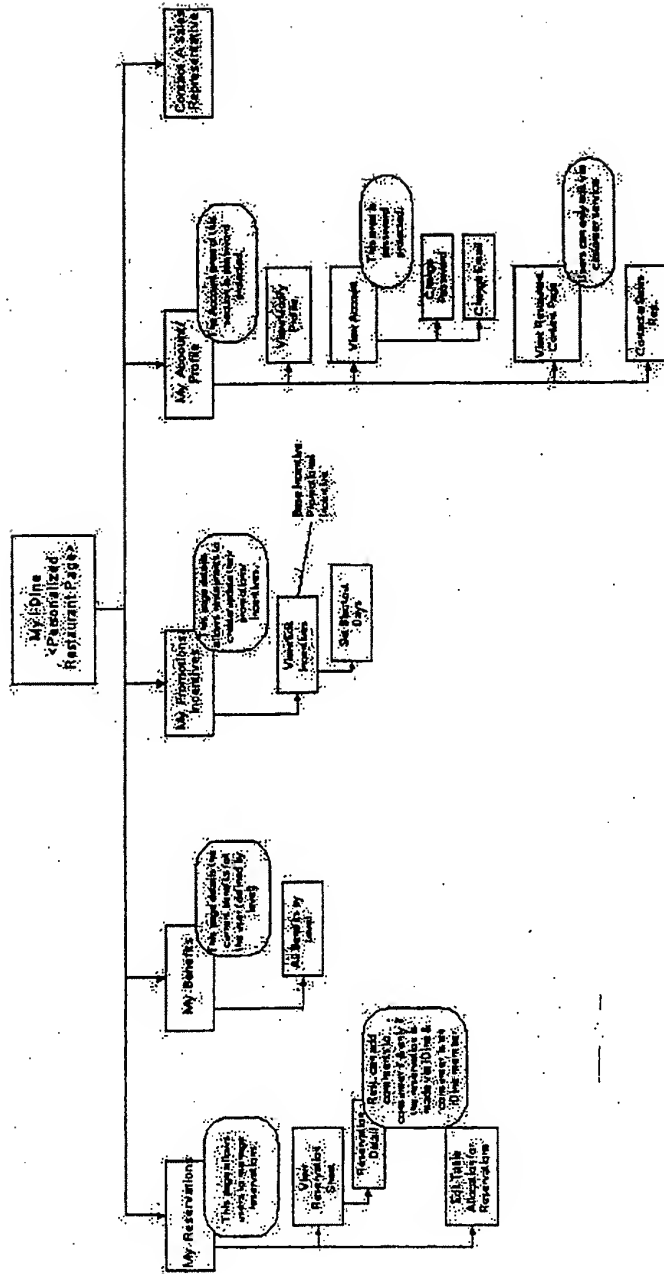


FIG. 3b



F16. 30



Applied

Dynamic Content

Static Content

Page Content

FIG. 3e

idine External Interface AS400 to Web System Overview 4/17/00

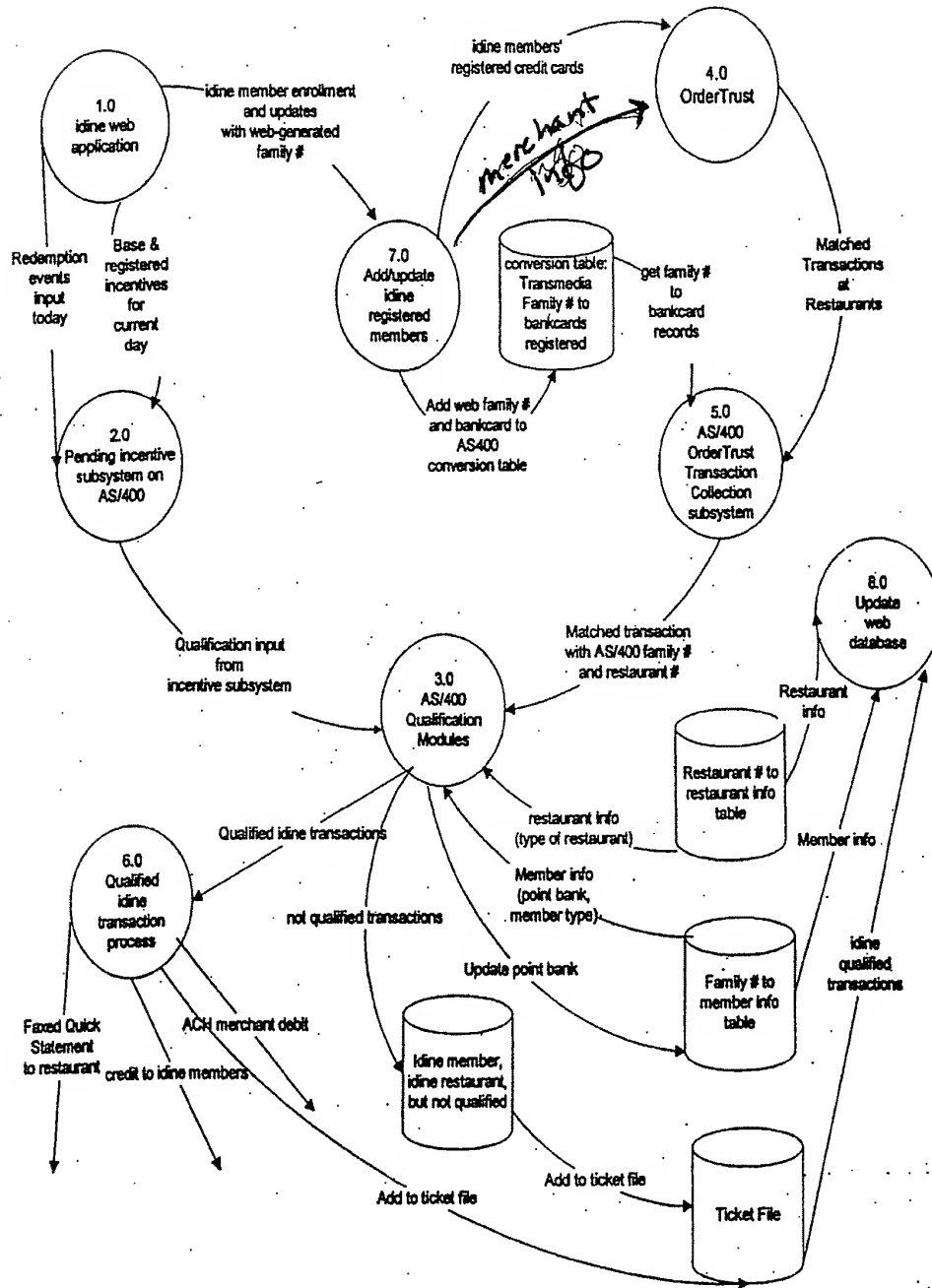


FIG. 4A

1.0 & 8.0 Exploded

idine Web Application Supporting Incentive & Redemption Management

4/17/00

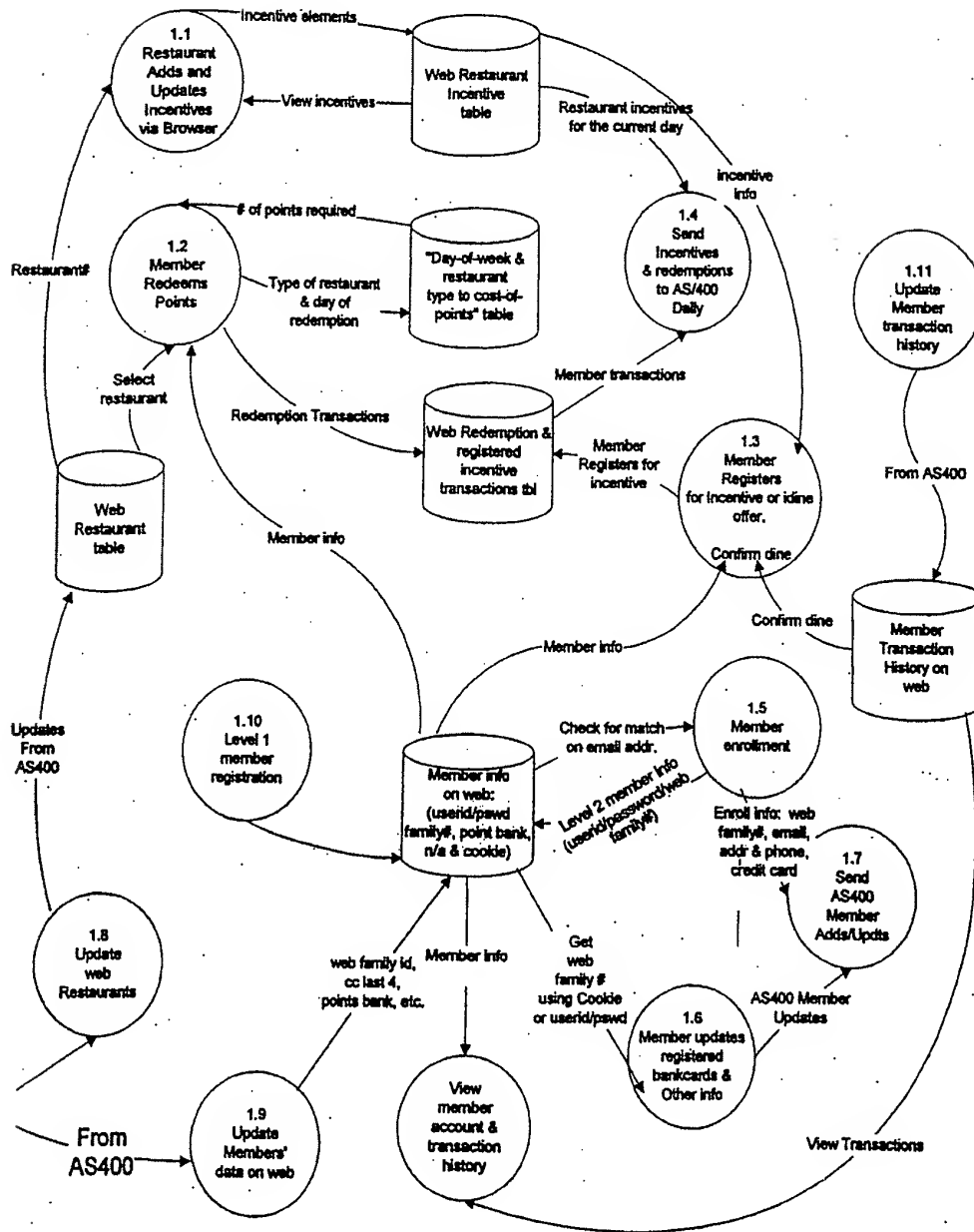


FIG. 4B

